



18th Battalion Association

Windsor and Detroit Branch

* MEMORIES *

While we were at La Clyte, Jack Gehl and Dick Hamill were assigned to a special work party with the Engineers. While they were away the rest of us went into the M. & N. trenches for our regular turn. Several days later, Dick Hamill came back with the sad news that Jack had been killed the day before. We were all sorry as Jack was one of the best-liked men in the Platoon, and one of the most popular in the Company. His boyhood chum, Pat Branoff, was stunned. The following Friday, we were relieved and made the long hike back to La Clyte in a drizzling rain.

The following day, Saturday, was nice and sunny, and while we washed, shaved, and had breakfast, most of us hung our uniforms out to dry. Pay Parade was to be at noon and Captain Lamb came over, each man receiving fifteen francs. A group, including Pat Branoff, Dick Hamill, Sammy Tooke, and others, decided to go over to La Clyte. After a short stop at our favourite Estaminet, we all went to a house near the Hospital to have some eggs and chips. The old lady, who waited on us, was very friendly, and even put some extra rations on the table. Before we left, she insisted that we all have a glass of wine with her, charging us only for the eggs and chips. (A Lance Corp. at the next table intimated she had a married daughter residing in Delhi.)

After we got outside, Pat Branoff stopped and declared he was going to find Jack Gehl's grave. Although we tried to dissuade him, he was so determined that we decided to go along with him. But how did you find the grave of someone who was killed in another part of the line? We knew Jack wasn't buried at La Clyte as that cemetery was filled up a long time ago. I believe one of the group knew someone in the Brigade Office and he went over to see him. He came back with some directions, and we merely followed the leader. We walked about three miles away from La Clyte and after making a couple of right-hand turns, we found the cemetery which was supposed to have been planned and set out by the Engineers. It was a barren field with a lot of shell holes, most of which were half-filled with water. There were no markers, no grass, no trees. It was a bleak spot. At the top of the field, there were some fresh mounds of earth and at the top of the mound, there was a glass jar with a card inside, giving the name and Regimental Number of the soldier who was buried there. We found Jack's grave, and while Pat and one of the others knelt down and took out their Rosary to pray for the dead, the rest of us just stood around.

We then started back down the muddy lane, but when we had only gone a short way, Pat Branoff broke down and sobbed bitterly. After a while, Pat apologized and we continued on to the huts, as none of us felt like celebrating and were glad to get back.

It seems strange that with Death all around us at all times, we should grieve so over one soldier, but Jack was someone special and Death had not as yet touched our Platoon too heavily. This would change. The attack on the Craters at St. Eloi was coming and we would play a prominent part. It was a sad afternoon. There would be other sad afternoons to come.